Transportation
Land Development
Environmental
Services

Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.

Kilton Road
Six Bedford Farms, Suite 607
Bedford, New Hampshire 03110-6532
603 644-0888
FAX 603 644-2385

Attendees:	See Attached List	Date/Time:	3/16/00 7:00pm
		Project No.:	50885
Place:	Gerrity Community Center	Re:	Derry Public Officials I-93 Salem to Manchester
		Notes taken by:	Bruce Tasker

Jeff Brillhart explained the Background and Purpose of the Project

This project involves at constructing improvements along I-93 between state line Salem and the I-93 I-293 split in Manchester, a distance of approximately18 miles or so.

The Department is proposing to widen the north and southbound barrels from the existing two lanes in each direction to three or four lanes in each direction. In addition, the five interchanges along this section of I-93 would be reconstructed or otherwise improved.

The project is a part of the State's Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Program. It was included in the original Ten-Year Plan adopted back in 1986.

The Department first began looking at what might be needed along the corridor in 1988 and 89. As the Department proceeded, the Environmental Resource Agencies indicated that a much more in-depth environmental study would be necessary to consider all alternatives and justify the proposed widening. In 1991, the Department agreed to conduct the highest level of study, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The EIS was underway in 1992, and at that point questions were raised as to the Department's methodology for projecting future traffic volumes on I-93 and how improvements to I-93 interfaced with the rest of the transportation network in NH. The outcome of the discussion was to have a consultant create a Statewide Transportation Corridor Model.

By 1998, the model was nearing completion, the Department hired VHB to do the engineering and provide overall coordination for the EIS.

Over the last 2 years, base mapping has been updated; existing environmental (natural, cultural, socio-economic) resources have been cataloged, mapped, and evaluated; the model has been calibrated and traffic data has been developed; and the overall background information put together so that alternatives can be considered in a reasonable way.

The purpose of the project is to improve transportation efficiency and reduce safety problems associated with this 18-mile segment of I-93. Options include reactivating rail service; improving

bus service and other Transportation Demand Management Strategies (like Park & Ride accommodations, Intelligent Transportation Systems technology), widening the highway and improving the interchanges.

I-93 is a major interstate highway, and perhaps the major transportation link in NH. It is vital to NH's social and economic well being and it is in need of being improved.

The highway has a theoretical capacity to carry in the vicinity of 60,000 to 70,000 vpd. In the Salem area, the highway currently carries over 100,000 vpd. By 2020, the projected volumes are approximately 140,000 vpd. The projected volumes are on the conservative side; that is they are low in comparison to earlier projections.

Regardless, the highway is beyond being over capacity. The amount of traffic results in the highway being less forgiving and consequently less safe. The demand on the corridor requires consideration of significant improvements. This study is intended to provide a thorough review of the issues, options, and ramifications, so that the State can move forward with constructing the necessary improvements.

Tony Grande discussed the Regional Map and 400 scale base plans and project issues

Regional Location Map

- The map shows surrounding towns and major roadways east and west of I-93.
- The segment under study begins at the NH/MA state line and proceeds approximately 18 miles to the I-293/I-93 split.
- Also shown on the map are 3 existing and one potential rail corridor:
  - the West corridor is the existing rail line from Lowell, MA, north through Nashua, Merrimack, Bedford and up to Manchester,
  - the East corridor is the abandoned M&L rail line and it extends from Lawrence, MA, north through Salem, Windham, Derry, Londonderry and up to Manchester;
  - the Portland to Boston rail corridor through Dover, Exeter, Plaistow to Lawrence MA. This existing rail corridor currently under reconstruction and service is expected to begin in Jan. 2001;
  - an I-93 median rail corridor alternative is proposed.

400 Scale Map

The 400 scale base map and color coding shows the existing conditions (existing pavement, existing buildings, right of way, etc) and resources (wetlands, open water, potential historic districts and structures, etc). The map begins at the MA/NH state line and proceeds northerly for approx. 18 miles through the Towns of Salem, Windham, Derry, Londonderry and Manchester, ending at the I-93/I-293 split.

Existing Conditions / Problem areas

- Highway was built in the 1960's and consequently has substandard geometrics and components in areas.(cable guard rail; 4' inside shoulder)
- Back ups currently occur along the mainline traveling SB in the morning and NB in the evening particularly in the southern half of the corridor.
- Back ups also occur at several interchange locations where the interchange is unable to process the volumes of traffic and traffic backs up onto the highway. Of particular concern is the Exit 3 NB off ramp and the Exit 5 SB off ramp.
- The congestion is the result of the highway at, or exceeding capacity.
- Weaving/merging traffic at Exit 2 SB is a problem.

- Acceleration and deceleration areas are inadequate in length for on and off ramps; a longer transition would allow drivers more time and give a better comfort level getting on and off the highway.

Recent Roadway and Bridge Work Completed in the I-93 Corridor

- Exit 1 NB lane addition as part of the Rockingham Mall development (1990) added capacity.
- Salem rest area reconstruction (1993) improved facility capacity and access.
- Exit 4 interchange reconstruction (1990) added capacity.
- Weigh stations in Windham currently under construction to improve truck safety.
- Windham Bridge over 111A (replaced 1994)
- Windham – Bridges over North Lowell Road (replaced 1994/96)
- Derry – Bridges over Fordway Extension (widened & rehab – 1996)
- Derry – Bridges over Kendall Pond Road (widened & rehab – 1996)
- Londonderry – Bridges over Stonehenge Road (replaced 1994/95)
- Manchester – Bridges over Cohas Brook and Bodwell Road (widened & rehab – construction underway)

Three types of environmental resources to be evaluated include natural, cultural, socio-economic resources. Secondary impacts (those which occur as an indirect result of constructing an improved highway system) are also of concern and will be evaluated.

Some of the potential resource concerns that have been identified to date, include:

- Property impacts (and noise impacts) where buildings/neighborhoods/commercial developments are close to I-93 or interchange areas.
- Porcupine Brook/Prime Wetlands - Salem
- Potential flood issues - Salem
- Canobie Lake – Drinking water supply - Windham
- Cobbetts Pond residential and recreational area -Windham
- Archaeological (median) & Historic Resources (Searles Castle-Windham)
- Prime Wetlands – Derry
- Cohas Brook – Manchester

The range of alternatives to be evaluated for this project:

- No Build – used as baseline for comparison.
- TSM Improvements; projects that can enhance safety and provide some congestion relief, generally within the ROW (adding or extending turn lanes, providing or improving traffic signals, employing Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) technology).
- Widen I-93 to 6 or 8 lanes.
- Widen I-93 to 8 lanes w/HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle), lanes for vehicles w/2 or more passengers.
- TDM Strategies- opportunities which reduce demand on the highway system (i.e. park & ride lots, ridesharing, transit bus and train- including consideration of an I-93 median rail corridor for a passenger only rail service with possible stations located at Exits 2,3,4,5).

Jeff Brillhart Reviewed the Project Process and Schedule

There are three stages a project goes through once it is on the State's Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Program. These are:

1. Preliminary Design and Environmental Documentation and approval of a layout.
2. Final Design and Purchase of Right-of-Way.
3. Construction.

The project is currently in the first Stage – Preliminary Design and Environmental Documentation.

Within the Preliminary Design and Environmental Documentation stage, there are typically five phases:

1. Scoping Phase – data collection and issues identification.
2. Alternatives Phase – develop and screen conceptual alternatives.
3. Detail Alternatives Phase – develop detailed alternatives.
4. Environmental Documentation and Public Hearing Phase – develop draft environmental documentation and hold Public Hearing.
5. Finalize Environmental Document and Obtain Approvals Phase.

The Department is just completing the Scoping Phase (data collection and issues identification) and is proceeding forward with the Alternatives Phase (developing conceptual alternatives).

The completion of the Scoping Phase will be signified by the publication of the Scoping Report, due out in May.

The completion of the Alternatives Phase will be signified by the publication of the Rationale Report, due out January 2001.

Completion of the Draft EIS and the holding of the Public Hearing are scheduled for January 2002, and approvals are scheduled for January 2003. Construction will begin in early 2004.

An ATF committee has been established to review issues and information periodically through the study process. Each Community has appointed two members and the two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) have appointed one member each. The first meeting is March 22nd in Manchester. Subsequent meetings will occur about every 6 weeks, in the various towns along the route.

The next series of Public Official meetings are anticipated to be held in August/September of this year at which conceptual designs will be available.

Jeff opened the meeting up to questions;

Comment. Craig Bulkley, Town Council Chairman. 1) Why are we looking at a range of alternatives? We know what needs to be done. How can construction be expedited? 2) Does the Department have the resources to move the project quickly? 3) How will Exit 4A be tied to this project?

Jeff. 1) The Federal government will pay for 90% of this project and federal permits will be required. Consequently, federal law and regulations must be followed. Even if all federal agencies agreed to expedite the process by eliminating some of the steps,

some organizations would take us to task if we did not examine the nature and significance of the impacts on all resources. 2) The Department has (and is using) the resources necessary to expedite the project. This project is as high a priority as any project the Department has. Planning for this project is critical, as this may be the last major construction for this section of I-93. The Department can not come up with alternatives arbitrarily; there needs to be a process. If there is no systematic process, it may be necessary to revisit those ideas that were dismissed, which will actually slow down the development of the project. 3) The I-93 and Exit 4A projects are following similar processes. There is coordination between the Department and the Towns and the Town's consultant.

Comment. Roberta Robie, Exit 4A Advisory Committee. The I-93 project has already been delayed. To assure that there are not further delays, it is important that letters be sent to our representatives in the state and congressional delegations. Will the rail corridor be built now as part of this widening project?

Jeff. This project is primarily concerned about the widening of I-93, but it is prudent that consideration be given to what might be needed to accommodate future rail options. Deciding which rail corridor and developing plans that are more detailed will require some future rail study be completed.

Comment. The Department proposes that the earliest construction can begin is 2004. 1) Can the bridges be reconstructed now to accommodate the future highway widening and the proposed rail corridor? 2) Are the weigh stations located so they will not be moved again?

Jeff. 1) Early on, the Department tried to accommodate additional widening at the bridges for those bridges needing reconstruction along this section of I-93. The idea was resisted by the resource agencies because it was thought the widenings would dictate the location of the future I-93 improvements prior to having a corridor study. As the bridge projects continued, the resource agencies agreed that this may not be such a problem, and the Department was able to over-widen some of the structures to accommodate traffic control conditions during construction and have additional width for the future widening of I-93. 2) The Department is reasonably confidant that the weigh stations will not have to be relocated.

Comment. 1) What will be the driving force in determining whether three or four lanes are built? 2) Will construction start at the state line and move north? 3) What are the needs for right-of-way? Back in the 1960's a 600-ft. swath was taken, can the widening improvements be built within that width? 4) If a rail corridor is activated, is it more likely to be in the median?

Jeff. 1) The needs of the highway will govern whether three or four lanes in each direction will be proposed. Four lanes appear to required south of Exit 3. North of Exit 3, traffic volumes are somewhat lower so perhaps three lanes will suffice. Perhaps in this area, the foot print for four lanes will be graded out but only three lanes will be paved. The right of way width should be sufficient to allow four lanes. It is the Department's intent to provide for the highway needs between now and 2020, but also do enough planning so as not to preclude other possible needs the corridor could serve in the future. 2) Where construction begins has not yet been determined; these elements will be considered later in the process and finalized as part of the final design process. 3)

The right-of-way that will be necessary to accommodate the improvements has not been determined as yet.

Bruce Tasker. 3/. Back in the 60's, 600-ft may have been a reasonable width, but in the area of Exit 3, the median is nearly 1200 ft. The amount of width for the corridor is dependent on a number of factors: topography, design criteria and constraints.

Jeff. 4) The Project will not determine whether the rail option in the median or the rail option for resurrecting the East Rail Corridor should ultimately be used to address rail service through this area. The project will determine what a rail option may need. In terms of widening I-93, rail is a future option and it should not be precluded.

Comment. George Sioras, Derry Planning Director. Building three or four lanes will be important to local planning. There is a lot of development to the east. Chester is one Town that is growing. Derry serves as their access to I-93.

Jeff. From the Department's perspective, traffic volumes are increasing regardless of whether three or four lanes are built on I-93. Towns need to start to plan for this traffic and growth. Access management is one tool being looked at seriously by a number of cities and towns.

Comment. John Langoni, State Representative: There will be a significant secondary affect on individual towns.

Comment. Dave Petroy: 1) Is it 8 lanes or 10 lanes? 2) Is a complete build out analysis for the cities and towns being done in the traffic models? 3) Is there any way to keep the train idea going, so that 10 years from now the train idea will not have to start from scratch to solve the traffic problem?

Ansel Sanborn. 1) Eight lanes. 2) Traffic models are based on data from planning commissions, census data and surveys. This statewide corridor model identifies trips, and people movement and choices (car, bus, train, carpool etc.) The model is projecting data 20 years into the future. In the model, the expected build scenario for the next ten and twenty years is included. In most cases, the communities have not been totally built out in that time frame.

Jeff. 3) It would be very expensive to provide the highway widening and train service. Buses will most likely be the way NH will address the short-term traffic demands, but the project needs to be planned so as not to preclude trains.

Comment. George Katsakiores, State Representative--Two important issues: time frame and cost. Relative to time frame, the Department should proceed with 3-lanes and address the immediate problem. Such an approach will also save money. If rail is considered, freight should be included. Including freight may make the rail line financially viable, where as passenger-rail-only probably is not, and would require subsidies. It would appear that it would be more cost effective to build a rail line parallel to I-93 and not in the median. The Department gets approximately $140M/yr from the federal government for state projects. The funding needs to be spread out to best serve the State. The real cost of this project needs to be determined and not just estimated at $150M to find out it cost $180M. In addition, opportunities for public and private partnerships should be investigated, as such coordination can expedite the process.

Comment. Gordon Graham, Derry Town Council. 1) How does the model accommodate the through traffic; that is, tourism traffic? It seems that only weekday traffic is being considered. 2) In addition, it appears that the traffic accidents and fatalities primarily occur on weekends during the tourist seasons.

Ansel Sanborn. As previously stated the model is based on trips. The model does not specifically address tourist traffic, though the total volume of traffic in the weekends represent the design hour volume. Since many tourist trips are discretionary in terms of timing, attempts to influence the demand for these trips is possible.

Comment. Must all the wetlands project wide be considered, before construction can begin? If Salem has a lot of wetlands, can construction start in another area?

Jeff. The entire project needs to be looked at in total relative to the layout and impacts before approvals are given and construction begins. To do otherwise is called segmentation, which the agencies find unacceptable.

Comment. Will we have to wait for the Department to complete I-93, before Exit 4A can be constructed?

Jeff. The projects are being coordinated. The Exit 4A project is further along than the I-93 project, and if approved could be constructed prior to the I-93 construction. It is important that the Exit 4-A layout be able to accommodate the I-93 improvements so that whatever is constructed will not have to be unnecessarily reconstructed later.

Comment. Paul Elch, Derry Town Council. The three-lane option should not be considered. At the very least there should be three lanes in each direction with a center reversible lane (i.e. seven lane section total)

Jeff. The seven-lane section is typically used to accommodate HOV's with the center reversible lane available to HOV's in one direction or the other depending on the time of day. HOV lanes require the proper balance relative to traffic volumes. If there is too much HOV traffic, the lane does not operate well and the benefit is not realized. If there is too little HOV traffic, then the motorists in the general lanes will demand it be discontinued.

Comment. Bob Letourneau, State Representative: With the traffic increasing from 104,000 vpd to 140,000vpd in Salem and 60,000 vpd to 81,000 vpd in Derry the rail option should definitely be looked at as the Department is proposing.

Comment. Tom Colantuono, Executive Councilor District 4. 1) What is the status of wetland mitigation? 2) Is anyone saying don't build four lanes now? Looking 40 or even 50 years into the future, it would seem prudent to provide for at least four lanes in each direction.

Jeff. 1) In an effort to expedite the permitting needs of the project, the Department has been working with the Resource Agencies, and has received concurrency, to construct two mitigation sites in advance of the I-93 widening. The Department is in the process of going forward with the purchase of properties and the design and construction of two sites, one in Salem (approximately 4 acres of wetland creation and 20 acres of preservation) and one in Londonderry (approximately 15 acres of creation and 60 acres of preservation). Both sites are disturbed gravel pits and together they are expected to be the cornerstone of the Departments wetland mitigation for the widening of I-93. Additional mitigation is also expected to be required along the corridor to address specific, more localized impacts. 2) At this time, no one has said

do not consider four lanes. Typically, the layout would only include what is required in the design time frame of 20 years. Given the investment and importance of the I-93 corridor, it may be found that the layout needs to accommodate four lanes. The Commissioner feels strongly that at the very least four lanes be accommodated, if not constructed.

Comment Might it be possible to build a new road from Massachusetts directly into Salem and thus remove the shopping traffic from I-93?

Jeff. Building a new road is generally more difficult to do than expanding the existing highway. This option is not under consideration.

Comment What is the number of years you design a road for?

Jeff. The design horizon is generally twenty years. Trying to look beyond 20 years, given the uncertainties involved, is very difficult.

Comment Please explain the problems that arose with the traffic modeling process?

Ansel Sanborn. The strength of the model is trips versus vehicles. The model tries to replicate the choices people make as to how they will get to and from their destination. To predict how people will travel, a number of data sources need to be used: the 1990 census, origin and destination surveys, personal preference surveys, and personal interviews to name a few. This information had to be referenced by geographical location and the samples expanded statistically to match ground counts for traffic. This process proved more complicated and time consuming than anticipated. Once the model was completed, a formal calibration of the most current ground counts and comparisons to regional transportation models to insure consistency was necessary. The tasks were time consuming, but necessary.

Comment. John Gleason, State Representative. What initiatives is the Department thinking about in terms of bus service?

Jeff. Measures to enhance bus service are being considered as part of the overall I-93 improvements. In meeting with the bus service provider for the I-93 corridor, they would propose that more bus stops be constructed and more buses be put into service. In Massachusetts, the Merrimack Valley Regional Planning Commission is looking into providing bus service from various parking lots along the I-93 corridor in NH, to some of the businesses along River Road in Massachusetts.

Comment. Because of the serious accidents that have occurred between Exits 1 and 2 and between Exits 4 and 5, can there be some type of preferential status given to these areas for this project?

Jeff. A layout for the entire corridor needs to be developed and approved before long-term type improvements can be constructed. The Department will be considering some interim type improvements to ease congestion and enhance safety to a degree. What might be done sooner than later remains to be seen.

Comment Bob Letourneau, Representative. There was a 40-car accident 2 to 3 years ago, it was difficult for safety personnel to get to that accident. It's only going to be worse. The project needs to go forward as quickly as possible.

Comment John Langoni, State Representative. 1) Relative to mitigation, it seems that the determination of where and how much is somewhat arbitrary. 2) Wasn't there a lot of mitigation for NH 101 project?

Jeff. 1) There is a fair amount of leeway as to the location, amount, and type of mitigation required for a project. To a degree, it is negotiated based on the quality of resources impacted and the amount of impact. 2/. The NH 101 project required a significant amount of mitigation to obtain a permit for construction.

Comment Roberta Robie, Exit 4A Advisory Committee. Was the Department initially only considering three lanes?

Jeff. Initially in the late 1980's, the Department was considering three north of Exit 1, but after the volumes continued to increase, it became apparent that three lanes would not be sufficient over much of the corridor.

Comment Is there anything in the meantime that might be done to help congestion?

Bruce Tasker. A number of possible interim measures that may help alleviate some of the congestion are being considered: a possible shoulder-lane-use opportunity from Exit 1 to Exit 3 NB; a double left turn at the Exit 3 NB ramps; possible signalization at the Exit 3 SB ramps; a potential truck climbing lane at the Exit 2 NB on-ramp; longer decel-lane for Exit 5 SB off-ramp; modifications to signal timing at South Policy Road and Pelham Road intersection; installing Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) technology (i.e. variable message boards, etc.). Which if any of these make sense and which could be constructed or implemented in advance of completing the EIS, is not known yet.